

ADAM G. KENDALL

Henry W. Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry

The Whitewash Committee of 1914: The Knights of Columbus, Freemasonry and anti-Catholicism in California

ABSTRACT

This essay explores and contextualizes the rising anti-Catholic sentiment during the 1910s found within American fraternal societies, particularly Freemasonry, in addition to its condemnation by the Catholic Church. The study is illustrated by the public controversy involving the so-called Masonic Whitewash Committee of 1914–15, which included prominent grand officers of the California Grand Lodge (some of whom were later involved in the 1921 California Ku Klux Klan controversy) that investigated an alleged oath of the Knights of Columbus entered into the 1913 United States Congressional Record. The oath was determined by this unofficial committee to be fallacious (as had countless others, including Congress), and its conclusion set off a nationwide controversy within the fraternal and public press as a defense for what was believed to be Catholic infiltration of institutions at all levels of American society. The California Grand Lodge joined in the condemnation, claiming the committee's use of Masonic titles gave the false impression that it was officially sanctioned by the governing body. To make matters worse for the committee, their report was also admitted into the 1915 Congressional Record by Congressman William Kettner, the then Grand Marshal for the Grand Lodge.

Allegations of favoring Catholic political candidates, along with the 'whitewashing' of the committee's actions via fraternal politicking and character

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assassination were played out in the era's infamous anti-Catholic newspapers. The essay seeks to demonstrate that this little-known conflict is in fact one of many footnotes that characterized anti-Catholic nativism and hyper-patriotism during the 1910s, as well as highlighting the Catholic defense of their own contribution to the American way of life. This paper also illustrates the distinct and important role fraternal organizations and their members played as arbiters and, sometimes, challengers of social trends.

During the summer of 1928, John Whicher, long-time Grand Secretary for the Grand Lodge of California, received letters from the Johnston Herald newspaper in North Carolina as well as from several private citizens in that same state, which inquired if a committee from the Grand Lodge of California had made a 1915 investigation by leading California Masons into an oath taken by the Catholic fraternal order, the Knights of Columbus, finding it fraudulent. While most read as inquisitive, a few seem to suggest an unstated agenda. One letter, penned by J.A. Day, openly stated,

[...] There is considerable talk here in NC [North Carolina] about the oath Clyde Hoey [?] a prominent lawyer is speaking for Al Smith (H)e said that Cal Freemasons investigated the oath and found it to be false. The oath is on record in the NC Congress. It is the most honorable oath that can be administered by man if you have not seen it I will send it to you if you wish to see it. [sic]

Mr. Day concludes,

Will thank you for any information if as to whether it is true if not if it is Every Mason should know it. [sic]

(Day, 1928)

Mr. O.F. Armfeld of the North Carolina newspaper, *The Johnston Herald*, inquired in August 1928:

It had come to my attention that the alleged oath of the 4th degree Knights of Columbus [...] (I) am not seeking this information to use in propaganda work but to satisfy my own mind. I cannot believe such an oath to be taken by an American [...] [sic]

(Armfeld 1928)

Still another, one Eugene Craig, writing on the letterhead of the Lola Manufacturing Company of Stanley, North Carolina, wonders:

As a Mason and a Protestant I would like to know if the purported oath of the Knights of Columbus has ever been investigated in your state? We have word [...] that the Grand Lodge of your state investigated the purported oath and found it to not to be the oath of the Knights of Columbus. Please advise if this is true. [sic]

(Craig 1928)

What was this oath? What was this committee of the Grand Lodge of California, and who were its members? Furthermore, why did this particular

subject interest these inquirers – especially in relation to Al Smith, the Governor of New York and a Catholic? The answer lies in the documentation of the controversy surrounding this Masonic-based committee and the subsequent reaction provoked by the committee's investigation of the alleged fourth degree oath of the Knights of Columbus. While Grand Secretary Whicher's response was unassuming and informative, it was little more than a bland statement of fact: the affair was the result of an inquiry from a self-appointed committee from 1915 composed of four high-ranking grand lodge officers, on request from Hon. Paul J. McCormick, California Superior Court Judge for Los Angeles County, and a State deputy officer in the Catholic fraternity, the Knights of Columbus [K of C]. Essentially, the committee was reporting on an investigation into an alleged oath of that Order labeled simultaneously as spurious and treasonous. Further, this oath had previously been entered into the *Congressional Record* on 15 February 1913 by Pennsylvania Representative Thomas S. Butler. Concluding, Whicher stated that the Grand Lodge of California had not authorized the committee (Whicher 1928).

The investigation occurred, in part, as the result of outraged and anti-Catholic sentiment within fraternal orders, since according to recorded accounts of members of the K of C, none had ever recalled taking an oath worded in that particular way. Indeed, many of them were shocked that they would be accused of taking a treasonous oath dedicated to subverting and persecuting not only Protestants, but of the American government itself (Anon 1922a).

In addition to maintaining an unfailing allegiance to the Holy Catholic Church, the oath rails against the governments of Protestant menace, and mimicking common fraternal oaths and obligations of fealty, concludes with a bloody penalty,

[...] I do further promise and declare that I will, when opportunity presents, make and wage relentless war, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants and Masons as I am directed to do, to extirpate them from the face of the whole earth; and that I will spare neither age, sex, or condition, and that I will hang, burn, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive these infamous heretics; rip up the stomachs and wombs of their women, and crush their infants' heads against the walls in order to annihilate their execrable race. That when the same cannot be done openly I will secretly use the poisonous cup, the strangulation cord, the steel of the poniard, or the leaden bullet [...] as I at any time may be directed so to do by any agents of the Pope or Superior of the Brotherhood of the Holy Father of the Society of Jesus.

(Congressional Record 1913: Volume XLIX, Part IV, page 3216)

This oath actually has a long history. It was known as the 'Jesuit oath' until 1912 when it was transformed to the select fourth degree of the Knights of Columbus by William O. Black of the early twentieth-century quasi-secret society *Guardians of Liberty*. According to Michael Williams' ([1932] 2003: 299) *Shadow of the Pope*, the oath (in part) originally dates from 1680 by the pen of the English forger Robert Ware. Other paragraphs are attributed to the same year from the anti-Irish Catholic agitator Robert Boltron. Other subsequent additions were made by various European and American contributors. The last paragraphs, in an attempt to specifically discredit the Knights of Columbus, were added by the *Guardians of Liberty*. Circulated in anti-Catholic and Catholic publications alike, the oath became a lightning rod of debate.

Thus, it can be regarded as an early twentieth-century flare-up of historical American and European prejudices, with a pointed focus on the Roman Church's objection to Freemasonry. These sentiments had increased over the years, becoming especially potent when they combined with the swelling American hyper-patriotism and nativism that rose to a fever pitch during the First World War.

This essay examines the independent Masonic investigation into the spurious K of C/Jesuit oath and the subsequent controversy from 1915 through 1917. It will look into their legacy that was to extend into the next decade with the rising anti-Catholic sentiment within American fraternal societies, particularly Freemasonry in California. Allegations of the committee members' favoring Catholic political candidates, the 'whitewashing' of the committee's actions by politicking and destruction of evidence, along with the character assassination of the committee's opponents, were played out in the era's infamous anti-Catholic and nativist newspapers. This little-known conflict is one of many historical footnotes of anti-Catholic agitation within American society, and underscores the popular use of secret societies in order to propagate sectarian and political agendas.

Historian John Higham once described anti-Catholicism as 'the most luxurious, tenacious tradition of paranoiac agitation in American history' (cited in Jenkins 2003: 23). This provocative statement is essentially an aptly-worded enhancement of Arthur Schlesinger Sr.'s observation that '[anti-Catholicism] is the deepest-held bias in the history of the American people' (cited in Jenkins 2003: 23). Prejudice against Catholics has historical roots in the American colonies as a *raison d'être* of the Protestant Reformation. Deep antagonism from the Protestant sects engendered proscriptions in colonial charters against the Catholic, and later aggression mimicked the same sentiment. From Jamestown pilgrims in the seventeenth century, the Know Nothing Party, the American Protective Association [APA] and the Junior Order of United American Mechanics [JOUAM] of the late 1800s, to the revived Ku Klux Klan of the early twentieth century, and further into the modern era, anti-Catholicism has remained consistent with its characterization of the Church as a heretical religious empire of despotism, idolatry and excess – almost always citing biblical prophecy as proof for condemnation (White [1923] 2010: 7–20). Klan champion, Bishop Alma White with her Pillar of Fire Congregation, wrote incessant articles in the periodical, *The Good Citizen*, about the power lust for world domination by the Catholic Church and its routing by her glorified white-robed army, the Ku Klux Klan,

[...] Political Romanism has become so accustomed to the stupidity and apparent indifference of Protestants that even those in the highest positions imagined that the goal was not far away, and it was evident that they were not anticipating a great white-robed army to appear on the field of action and thwart their plans. But history will show that down the centuries surprises have been sprung by an all-wise God upon those who have tried to usurp the throne of power and rule with a rod of iron.

([White 1923] 2010: 97)

It is not surprising that many American Masons of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries felt an antipathy, and even hatred, towards the Catholic Church because historically Freemasonry has been at loggerheads with the Church, being subjected to official Papal objection by Clement XII

in 1738. The Catholic objection of Freemasonry is, at its heart, due to the fact that Freemasons take oaths that the Church finds at variance with scripture, as well as being guilty of promoting secrecy, fomenting social discord or creating a pseudo-religious heterodoxy (Clement 1738). Further, there is Pope Leo XIII's 1884 *Humanum Genus* concerning the plots of Freemasonry,

For, from what We have above most clearly shown, that which is their [the Freemasons] ultimate purpose forces itself into view-namely, the utter overthrow of that whole religious and political order of the world which the Christian teaching has produced, and the substitution of a new state of things in accordance with their ideas, of which the foundations and laws shall be drawn from mere naturalism.

(Leo XII 1884)

Pope Leo was also to inspire a brand of Catholic social action. In the United States, this took the form of institutions created to care for the needy and the poor – an area already dominated by Protestant organizations. The Knights of Columbus was founded as a Catholic mutual benefit society at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1882 by the Venerable Father Michael McGiveney as a response to the disasters wrought upon families, especially in immigrant populations, when the breadwinner died. During this period, Catholics were largely excluded from labor unions and fraternal societies, while Protestant organizations held sway over the political and benevolent society landscape. While Columbus was viewed by Protestants as an American hero, the newly minted Catholic Order, inspired by renewed interest in Columbus upon the advent of his 400th arrival in the New World, regarded his patronage as an affirmation of their own place in American history (Anderson 2006; Kaufman 1982: 17).

The overall structure of the K of C resembles other fraternal benefit societies of its time, in that it expresses its lessons through a succession of ritual dramas called degrees, or grades, which are closely guarded against infiltration by the use of secret words, signs and handshakes known only to the members thereof. In the case of the K of C, there are four degrees, of which the last is a separate distinction conferred by special election (Supreme Council 2003–14).

The new Catholic social conscience, the increase in the population of Catholics entering politics and unease over immigration were essentially the causes for further anti-Catholic prejudice and violence. The formation of the Knights of Columbus was followed in 1887 with the rise of the unabashedly anti-Catholic American Protective Association [APA], which was essentially a modern and reinvigorated Know Nothing Party (Williams [1932] 2003: 94). There was also the lesser-known quasi-Masonic and militaristic, anti-Papist order dubbed the *Knight Commanders of the Sun* that was organized in the same year as the Knights of Columbus by California Masonic extraordinaire, Major Edwin A. Sherman, who was also the author of the 1883 book, *The Engineer Corps of Hell; or, Rome's sappers and miners. Containing the tactics of the 'militia of the Pope,' of the Secret manual of the Jesuits, and other matter intensely interesting, especially to the Freemasons and lovers of civil and religious liberty, whithersoever dispersed throughout the globe.*

Whether or not the ominously worded oath of the Knights of Columbus originated in 1680 and mutated into its early twentieth-century incarnation by the hands of the Guardians of Liberty, what remains important is that its publication within several Masonic magazines such as the *Southwestern*

Freemason and in nativist circulars, particularly *The Menace*, is evidence that the oath's legacy was a fertile ground that enabled former members of the Know Nothings and APA to form similar groups, or infiltrate existing fraternities, in order to further a radical dimension to American identity (Williams [1932] 2003: 114). Some participants within these factions were profiteers using popular prejudice and taking in millions of dollars from their followers. There were others, however, who probably objected to Catholicism based on intellectual grounds than base prejudice or bigotry, being convinced of a rational incompatibility with the principles of the United States and the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, while not necessarily approving of violence.

Because the oath had such an inflammatory and dangerous lineage within a community of muck-rakers and the paranoid, perhaps the Honorable Paul J. McCormick felt it necessary to seek an outside, yet fraternally related, investigation. Given the ideological chasm dividing Freemasonry and Catholicism, it is possible that an honest investigation by well-respected Freemasons would spark a new age of cooperation. That McCormick knew some of these Masons in the committee is unremarkable. These men were well-regarded businessmen and judges in Los Angeles, as well as known fraternalists and leaders within the Masonic Grand Lodge of California:

Motley Flint: Los Angeles banker and Past Grand Master of California; Dana Reid Weller: Los Angeles attorney, Past Grand Master of California; William Rhoads Hervey: Los Angeles Superior Court Judge, Venerable Master of the Los Angeles Scottish Rite Bodies for several decades, and a favorite candidate for the office of Grand Master of Masons in California; Samuel Burke: Los Angeles dentist, Past Master and Inspector of the 50th Masonic District. Burke would become the 1921 Grand Master of Masons in California and would crusade against the Ku Klux Klan's overtures toward the Masons in that State.

(Hervey, et al. 1914; Kendall 2011)

The group was furnished with the Knights of Columbus' ceremonials by McCormick, and made (we are told) a complete appraisal of the materials before publishing their report – being careful to affirm that the K of C was an honorable institution:

Our examination of these ceremonials and obligations was made primarily for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not a certain alleged oath of the Knights of Columbus which has been printed and widely circulated, was in fact used by the order, and whether if it was not used, any oath, obligation, or pledge was used which was or would be offensive to Protestants or Masons, or those who are engaged in circulating a document of peculiar viciousness and wickedness. We find that neither the alleged oath thereto in matter, manner, spirit, or purpose is used or forms a part of the ceremonies of any degree of the Knights of Columbus. The alleged oath is scurrilous, wicked, and libelous, and must be the invention of an impious and venomous mind.

(Hervey, Weller et al. 1914)

The report is emphatic that the real K of C rituals are patriotic, reverent of the U.S. Constitution and dedicated to the Catholic religion, but of no cause for fear to Protestants or Masons.

We can find nothing in the entire ceremonials of the order that to our minds could be objected to by any person. [emphasis mine]

(Signed) Motley Hewes Flint, 33rd degree, Past Grand Master of Masons of California; Dana Reid Weller, 32nd degree, Past Grand Master of Masons of California; William Rhodes Hervey, 33rd degree; Samuel E. Burke, 32nd degree, Past Master.

(Hervey, Weller et al. 1914)

This report was read into the 63rd Congress by William Kettner on 15 January 1915, and by the following September outraged lodges in California began submitting resolutions for the Grand Lodge to punish the committee. They pushed for a halt to the advancement of William Rhodes Hervey to the position of Senior Grand Warden on the grounds that the group had used Masonic titles to vet a non-Masonic, sectarian and Catholic order, thereby giving the impression that the investigation was officially sanctioned by Grand Lodge. University No. 394 in Los Angeles passed a resolution affirming their objection:

[...] Whereas said four men gave wide publicity to their report, which lauded said order [Knights of Columbus] to the skies, and whereas said four men signed this report with all their masonic titles and honors attached to their names, thus giving the false impression that this was an official report emanating from the masons of this jurisdiction, whereas this is not a true expression of the beliefs of the masons of this jurisdiction, but the personal belief of these four men,

[...] as one means of showing our disapproval we hereby instruct the Worshipful Master to vote against the advancement of Wm. Rhodes Hervey to the office of Senior Grand Warden [...] believing that it would tend to discredit and cast ridicule upon this jurisdiction to have a defender of Roman Catholic institutions seated in the Grand Master's chair.

(University Lodge No. 374 1915)

The following month another six-page resolution was anonymously published as a circular and sent to Elmer McGowen, Master of Morning Star Lodge No. 68 in Stockton. The resolution repeats several previous complaints mentioned by University Lodge, such as objecting to the advancement of Hervey, but adding several more which included a unique proposal that the committee make a public declaration via the news press that their findings did not reflect the policies of the Grand Lodge of California, and with the caveat that they repent for the trouble they caused everyone by defending a Catholic organization (Morning Star Lodge No. 68 1915).

The Masonic Grand Lodge of California formed a special tribunal in order to investigate the K of C committee, and while firm in its condemnation of the committee's actions, was far more lenient in its report. This committee was composed of William P. Filmer, Past Grand Master, Edward H. Hart, Past Grand Master, William H. Waste, Mason and 21st Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of California, J. H. Stephens and H. J. Owen. They summoned Hervey, Flint, Kettner, Burke and Weller, and made the following report [excerpted]:

There were summoned before the committee, in executive session, Brothers Hervey, Weller, Flint, Burke and Kettner; who were each requested to state frankly and fairly to the committee his particular

connection with the episode which has threatened to disturb the peace and harmony of the craft in this Jurisdiction. These brethren complied with our request, and we believe withheld nothing from us.

(Grand Lodge of California 1915: 487)

After examining documentary evidence such as newspaper clippings, pamphlets and magazines, this Grand Lodge special committee concluded that no ulterior motive actuated any of the participating members of the committee. They also failed to discover any intent to debase or stultify Freemasonry by exalting the aims of another organization. The investigation also concluded that none of the committee received sums of money – pointing out that any accusation to the contrary was vicious slander. Nor did the investigation find that the members of the committee suggested any political preferment by their action taken. Finally, that Kettner entered the committee report into Congress was because of his own misapprehension of it being authorized by the Masons of California. Further, the contested report's wide circulation was a result of it being franked by other members of Congress after its introduction into the *Congressional Record*. While the Grand Lodge investigation was lenient towards the committee members for their participation, it was firm with its resolution that they were simply ill-advised. The investigation concluded,

[...] The individual members of the committee are familiar with what has appeared in the public secular press of the country, and in Masonic publications during the year past [...] and the extent to which the unfortunate and ill-advised action of our Masonic brethren has been used to unduly exalt and magnify an organization in no way connected with Masonry – an organization which many members of the craft consider hostile to the best interests of our Order. Cumulative evidence of the chagrin, almost to sorrow; and the dissatisfaction felt by the members of the craft in this Grand Jurisdiction over the action of these brethren has been furnished by the outspoken remarks of the members of this Grand Body [...] Testimony before the committee gave indications of a widespread and intense feeling on the subject throughout the Jurisdiction [...] Not only should this Grand Body register a vigorous disapproval of what has been done in the present instance in the issuance and publication of the questionable documents complained of, but it should post a sign of warning, so plain that 'he who runs may read,' in order that there be no similar offense in the future.

(Grand Lodge of California 1915: 488)

By the time the Grand Lodge concluded its investigation into the committee, they believed that there had been no ulterior political motive for the investigation. Nevertheless, any link – however tenuous – with Catholic leaders was enough to excite radical patriots. This was typical: despite any small kernel of truth found within a story of Catholic abuse, such as in numerous exposés detailing the mistreatment of children in parochial boarding schools, to those who read their news via the nativist conspiracy presses these articles were nothing short of evidence of the enslavement of the populace through Catholic indoctrination and brutality (Kendall 2011).

It did not matter that the Committee's contact with the Knights of Columbus may have been an innocent defense against the libelous slander of the oath, or that the individuals involved may have known each other through

social and professional contacts. Such intermingling of interests was enough to prove a conspiracy of Catholic infiltration within California Freemasonry. Fueled by the certainty of their own logic, the anti-Catholic press in several instances openly challenged the committee and its defenders. As an example, a pamphlet entitled *The Pope's Army in the Toils: Those Peculiar Free Masons of Los Angeles as Viewed by Tom Watson* proudly declared that the committee be publically mocked for their folly at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco. The author declares,

[...] I will tell these moral cowards of Los Angeles one thing [...] Hereafter whatever these American traitors gain for their foreign master will not be gained, as heretofore, by the soft lies of such crafty old Jesuit cats [...] Hereafter, the gains of Rome will either come through the sluice gates of immigration, or through the betrayal of our schools, our newspapers, our Protestant churches, our politicians – and such spineless Masons as Flint, Weller, Hervey and Burke [...] Americanism is awake, and on guard, and we are going to arm ourselves as completely, FOR SELF-DEFENSE, as the Hibernian and Columbians have armed themselves to make war on us [...] But we have seen the guns, and we have seen the evidences of a perfect secret drill [...]

(Anon 1915)

This self-described force of dedicated Americanism was not alone with its exploitation of the committee's report: Catholics would also publish the same within newspapers in following years in order to bolster their own position as being patriotic Americans (Anon 1922b).

To the Masonic Grand Lodge of California, the issue had been settled. There was no wrongdoing, except that Hervey, Burke, Filmer, et al. had unwisely affixed to their names Masonic titles – presumably to add a certain gravitas to the report, or simply that using these titles was an instinctual habit; the reason will forever remain unclear. Yet, during the years leading to Hervey's eventual election as Grand Master in 1917, there remained a hot topic of debate as to whether Catholics could be Masons, and, further, whether Hervey's committee was a treasonous cadre of secret Catholic influence. Just as one can read the paranoid letters and articles of Papal conspiracy, one can also read scores of debates amongst other American grand lodges within the Grand Lodge of California's 1919 Report of the Committee on Correspondence, whereby they mull over the age-old question of whether Freemasonry is compatible with Catholicism. In all cases, there is a resounding 'NO' vote; while there may be good Catholic men who have joined, 'one cannot serve two masters' (Grand Lodge of California 1919: 19).

While less than fair and balanced (despite its stated claim), *Light*, a monthly Masonic news magazine published in Louisville, Kentucky, has been the most useful for chronicling the whole affair. According to this periodical, the chief target of the campaign against the committee would be William Rhodes Hervey, who was a richly powerful figure in Los Angeles Freemasonry – particularly the Scottish Rite. They argued that he would attract opposition by not only silencing the inquest into his participation with the committee, but would also be accused of whitewashing evidence by expelling members speaking against him, and destroying, or obfuscating, evidence (Light 1918: 104). Furthermore, in an attempt to link his activities to Catholic subversion and shadowy ethics, the *Light* would point to Hervey as being accused of legal

participation in a Southern Pacific Railroad land-grab in Los Angeles (Light 1918: 104–05).

The *Light* explained that during Hervey's Scottish Rite investigation into certain individuals (particularly John Jacob Jones) who vigorously accused him with collusion with the K of C., these men were asked if they were members of the Guardians of Liberty. This group was responsible for linking Hervey with the Southern-Pacific land-grab. Because Hervey, as an attorney, had a legal role in that case – as well as being connected with other Los Angeles politicians who were Catholic – his K of C 'whitewash' committee was therefore considered proof that he was aligned with Rome (Light 1918: 82).

Despite the overriding concept of brotherly love that (ideally) governs the fraternity, Masonic politics can be just as brutal as in other organizations – especially when a perceived party line is thought to have been breached. In this particular case, it was Hervey's involvement in the committee – ostensibly defending a Catholic organization – that caused dissention within the fraternity. Hervey was accused by John Jacob Jones and his supporters of burning their resolution against him, and directing his [Hervey's] Masonic officers to forget the matter. Thus, the independent committee investigating the K of C became known as 'Hervey's Committee', or 'The Whitewash Committee' (Light 1919: 82), coined because of the purported cover-ups designed to obfuscate their alleged political support and defense of a Catholic organization.

From the available evidence, it is possible to conclude that the oath was meant to be used as a propaganda tool against Catholics and their 'army', the Knights of Columbus. Using examples of past anti-Catholic agitation, factions opposing Al Smith's 1928 presidential campaign would continuously point to the oath's 1913 inclusion into the Congressional Record as proof of its validity (Williams [1932] 2003: 300) – thus justifying their rancor against the K of C, the Jesuits, the Pope and so on. The American social landscape was rapidly changing, and as more Catholics asserted their place within American politics and social life, the fearful and militant side of Protestantism invoked its age-old opposition. Later, other causes, such as anti-Communism and temperance, would be added to the roster of fears that would be woven into a fabric of conspiracy successfully championed by the Ku Klux Klan throughout the 1920s (Kendall 2011).

Was the 'Whitewash Committee' involved in subversive or corrupt politics? Insofar as scheming politicians will continue to seek influence through social avenues such as fraternal associations and special interest groups, this is only proof that those same institutions can be used by *any* individual for either nefarious or noble deeds, but there does not appear to be any visible evidence that the committee intended to influence politics. Hervey's own political savvy, colossal magnetism and influence would naturally expose him as a target. The agitators he investigated were eventually charged with unmasonic conduct as a result of their attempt to link Hervey with high crimes against Protestantism and the United States by defending the Knights of Columbus.

Was the Whitewash Committee's report an attempt to exonerate the Knights of Columbus? From the available material the exoneration only comes by way of the revelation that the oath in question was indeed bogus and had always been considered so – even by an ex-Kleagle of the Ku Klux Klan (Williams [1932] 2003: 307–08). The blowback was a symptom of long-standing prejudice and conspiracy between Protestant and Catholic. Certainly there may be darker avenues of intrigue, as the *Light*, *The Torch* and *The Menace* articles regularly suggested. However, their craven bias is an indicator

of the problems created by ancient sectarian divisions translated through current events.

The significance of the committee does not end with the members: memories of the incident would haunt Samuel Burke when he would eventually confront the Ku Klux Klan during his 1921 term as Grand Master. Given this, perhaps the case of the Whitewash Committee is actually a prologue of the events that were to transpire after the First World War. It is also a yardstick by which one can measure the social conditions that would allow the Klan to stake a claim in California as they had in other states, by working through the vast network of fraternal societies, churches and ultimately politics, in order to spread their message of 100 per cent Americanism (Kendall 2011).

The era that has been briefly examined is an ebb and flow of suspicion and fear against *'The Other'* – alien forces that are believed to threaten the American way of life. These waves of conflict vacillate between anti-Masonry, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia or a combination thereof. In each, secret societies and fraternal unions played an active part, each with their own agendas – both collective and by individual interpretation – often in contrast to their public overtures towards universal tolerance. Unfortunately, that noble quality is usually extended only to those with an exclusive mindset, and excludes those who do not fit within a particular mold. This is a human condition – an attempt to create order from chaos by identification with a particular worldview that will set one apart from the herd, in direct opposition to enemies, and establishing boundaries to keep out their corrupting influences. Sadly, it seems that fraternities and their members are not always on the side of the angels. In many cases they too are all too human. Perhaps the reception of the Whitewash Committee shows us why.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Adam G. Kendall is the Collections Manager and Curator of Exhibits for the Henry W. Coil Library and Museum at the Grand Lodge of F. & A.M. of California. A sixth-generation Californian, he is an enthusiastic advocate for state and local history, particularly in regard to fraternal and benevolent societies. He has presented on the topic of American fraternal organizations' social impact at several international symposia – most notably the British Association for American Studies at Exeter University (BAAS), the International Conference on the History of Freemasonry (ICHF), the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), The Quarry Project and the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, Massachusetts.

In addition to his public presentations, video scripts and exhibits, he has published several essays and reviews in notable publications such as the *Western Museums Association*, the *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, the *Journal of the Philalethes Society*, *Heredom*, *Ars Quatuor Coronati* and *Ahiman: A Review of Masonic Culture and Tradition*. He is also honored to be the 2013–14 President of the Masonic Library & Museum Association (MLMA).

Contact: Henry W. Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry, Grand Lodge of California, Free & Accepted Masons, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, California 94108, USA.

E-mail: akendall@freemason.org

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